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ABSTRACT

Most people do not associate community colleges with the terms "scholarship" and "research." One reason is that the mission statements of community colleges rarely include these terms when discussing teaching excellence. Another is that most people within higher education still hold the antiquated view that scholarship is simply research leading to publication. Other efforts such as addressing professional audiences at regional or national meetings, designing and conducting workshops and symposia, and preparing articles for respected professional journals are neither noted nor appreciated. If a broader view of academic scholarship were generally accepted, encompassing professional activity, artistic endeavor, engagement with novel ideas, community service, pedagogy, and research and publication, it would be more widely recognized that scholarship takes place at community colleges. Scholars at community colleges tend to be among the most devoted of the institution's instructors, for they make time for research while teaching a heavy course load, and are often not financially supported for their research by the institution. To encourage scholarly activities, the New Jersey Department of Higher Education recently sponsored a statewide conference to showcase two-year college scholarship. If scholarly activity is to prosper, community colleges must begin to value and stimulate scholarship from their faculty. (AJL)

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SPOTLIGHTING FACULTY SCHOLARSHIP AT THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

by

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Spotlighting Faculty Scholarship at The Two-Year College

Thomas R. Lord

An introductory social science class from an associate degree awarding institution recently completed a survey at a nearby shopping mall. Several hundred people were asked to describe the types of institutions they thought of when the terms "scholarship and research" were presented. The majority of the respondents thought of huge multi-faceted universities with elaborate graduate facilities and programs. Many people also included smaller baccalaureate-awarding institutions, but not one of the people surveyed thought of a community college as an institution where scholarship prevails. Too often the two-year colleges are seen only as teaching and vocational institutions that devote all their efforts to remediation and scholastics. The thought that scholarly inquiry regularly takes place in community colleges is a surprise to most people.

One of the major reasons for this misconception lies in the mission statements for the associate degree colleges. Most of the nation's community colleges are recognized as low tuition, open access institutions of higher education developed to serve local constituencies. To meet this challenge the colleges are required to offer a broad range of activities, including baccalaureate transfer programs, vocational and occupational options, remediation and basic skills courses, public and community services, and career counseling opportunities. Included in the list is generally a statement of teaching excellence but rarely do the terms scholarship and research appear in the mission statement of the community college sector.

Yet a great deal of scholarship and research is taking place in the associate degree institutions. Included on the teaching staff of most community colleges are recognized authors, poets, actors, historians, social and natural scientists and researchers. Scholars from two year institutions regularly address professional audiences at local, state, regional, and national meetings; many design and direct workshops and symposia at these levels; and a large number publish in respected professional journals. The nation's community colleges are alive with scholarly creation and innovation. Indeed, research has shown that much of the recent change in educational methodology and thinking has sprung from the community college. In their book, The Two Year College Instructor Today, Cohen and Brewer state that, on the average, a fifth of the faculty at a community college is involved in scholarly inquiry at any one time (a proportion not far off from that of our baccalaureate colleagues). Yet the work of the community college scholar is often not noticed or appreciated.

Perhaps the major reason for this lack of acknowledgment lies in an antiquated definition of scholarship held by many in today's higher education community. For some, the term scholarship only implies research leading to publication. Faculty work falling outside the definition is seen as academic dabbling. This type of stereotypical thinking excludes not only much of the scholarly activity in the community college but in most of the baccalaureate and smaller graduate institutions as well. Scholarship, instead, should be seen in a much broader context.

In a recent article on academic scholarship, Pellino, Blackburn, and Boberg suggested that scholarship contains six separate but important dimensions: professional activity, artistic endeavor, engagement with novel ideas, community service, pedagogy, and research and publication. Under this broadened definition, scholarship would include such activities as developing

innovative teaching materials/methods, writing articles/monographs/reviews/books, delivering papers/colloquia/lectures, creating art/poetry/prose/music/films, consulting/testimony, and writing impact studies/grants/reports. Most of these activities have gone on at associate degree institutions for years.

Scholars at the community college tend to be among the most devoted of the institution's instructors. When they are involved in a scholarly pursuit, they press the project into a week already filled with classroom sessions and evaluation. Unlike their colleagues in baccalaureate degree awarding institutions who are assigned only nine to twelve hours of classroom teaching a week and have time built into their routine for scholarly undertakings, community college scholars generally are required to meet their classes fifteen to eighteen hours a week. Furthermore, Cohen and Brewer report that community college scholars are more apt to serve on academic committees, advise students, participate in workshops and seminars, and take professional courses than are nonscholars. These two year college professors are also overwhelmingly biased in favor of academic journals and supportive of their professional organizations. Furthermore, although they enjoy teaching and value excellence, they rarely take on additional teaching loads. Interestingly, studies by Bresler (1968) and Faia (1976) found that college students generally rank as their best instructors those who have been successful in scholarship along with teaching.

To thrive in an environment where academic pursuit is generally not encouraged, the community college scholar has had to rely primarily on self motivation. Beside heavy teaching loads and other professional responsibilities, such obstacles as inadequate work space, poor and antiquated research equipment, lack of clerical support, and virtually no financial help, constantly hamper scholarly efforts. Yet scholarship continues at the two year college with the project's completion usually being the only reward.

To help break this trend and encourage scholarly pursuit at this level, the New Jersey Department of Higher Education has developed a plan to showcase the scholarship taking place in its two year colleges. With such an initiative institutions should change. Under the direction of the Office of Community Colleges, the Department recently sponsored a statewide conference entitled, Faculty Scholarship, Research and Creative Expression at the County Community College. Scholars from most of the state's two-year colleges gathered together to share their creative scholarship with other colleagues. The conference drew together playwrights, humanists, scientists, theorists, historians, researchers and other teaching staff from the community colleges. In most instances the professors had not met before and their scholarship was shared, scrutinized, and applauded by colleagues from other two-year institutions for the first time. As the conference continued, small groups of attendees were typically found outside of classrooms and around coffee urns continuing discussions from a previous session with the presenter.

A series of concurrently run sessions on a wide variety of topics were offered during the conference. In one room, several biologists described their research studies on such topics as the destruction of hazardous wastes and the immunotherapy of malignant cancerous tissues. Next door a group of social scientists discussed their research on active imagination, and the perception of moving occulded figures. Down the hall, professors of English presented a series of literary critiques on accomplished contemporary authors. Across the hall, a published historian discussed the early shipbuilding industry along the New Jersey coast, while in the room next to him three mathematicians discussed ways of enhancing cognition and imagery in their discipline.

Discussions on interfacing computers into the curriculum attracted the attention of many in attendance. These sessions were highlighted by computer

simulations developed by the community college instructors. Much interest was also directed to videotape and disc production where programs in health science appraisal, event documentation, and curriculm modification were presented. Sessions on teaching methodology and evaluation were also well attended with such topics as "evaluating the quality of classroom instruction," "in hot pursuit of excellence," and "motivating the community college student" drawing respectable numbers. During this time poets, dramatists, and lyricists presented readings of their creative works in a small rotunda.

After lunch, the conference theme was addressed by George Vaughan, the highly respected President of Piedmont Virginia Community College and author of The Community College Presidency. Dr. Vaughan began his presentation by affirming, as Pellino, Blackburn, and Boberg had done, that scholarship must be seen in a broad context. "Scholarship is an objective, rational, critical analysis of a topic," suggested Vaughan. "It is the umbrella under which research falls, for research is but one aspect of scholarship". Scholarship should be shared and scrutinized, Vaughan said, and therefore scholarship requires that one keep up with the development in his or her professional field. Dr. Vaughan stressed the need for county college faculty to pursue scholarly inquiry as a means of rejuvenation and academic enhancement. "My belief," Vaughan stated "is that community colleges cannot achieve their full potential as institutions of higher education until scholarship occupies a prominent place in their philosophy. The failure to include scholarship as an important element in the community college philosophy is a flaw that erodes the image, indeed erodes the status, of these institutions among other institutions of higher education." Scholarly inquiry, more than any other characteristic, stated Vaughan, is the base on which academia is built. When colleges choose not to encourage and promote scholarship within their walls, the basic foundation upon which the institution is built is severely shaken. Dr. Vaughan continued that community colleges generally do not recognize and reward scholarly

activities by their staff. "Rarely is scholarship ever mentioned in the promotion and retention process." On some of our campuses, Vaughan noted, the teaching staff members who become too scholarly end up as "academic outcasts" by their colleagues. Vaughan suggested further that the community colleges have not yet recognized the positive relationship between teaching and scholarship. As Bresler and Faia had discovered earlier, Vaughan reiterated the fact that the faculty members involved in scholarship are also the most effective and best-liked teachers in the institution. Vaughan concluded that community college faculty and administrators must realize that scholarship is not an option but an obligation of the profession of which they have chosen to be a part.

Scholarly inquiry at the associate degree awarding institution will not grow, however, unless the community college values and stimulates its two year colleges need to publicly recognize those professors on their campuses who are involved in scholarship, and the institution needs to encourage the instructors who are contemplating it. Seed money should be made available to get projects going, and teaching loads need to be reduced for the professors involved. Colleges should send faculty to conferences to share their scholarly projects with professional audiances and the institutions need to encourage writing for professional journals and newsletters. Clerical help, equipment and facility support should not be withheld and sabbaticals, internships, and faculty fellowships should be instituted.

Scholarship is an important ingredient in academia. It must be cultivated and rewarded as often as possible. Without encouragement, there is little chance that many community college professors will accept the challenge of scholarly inquiry. As David Brown, a professor at the Yale School of Organization and Management, remarked recently, "it is very easy to neglect your intellectual interests and moral sensibilities, when employers or clients have no use for them."

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